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ABSTRACT

Founded in 1967, Harlem Prep is an independent, non-sectarian school, located in the Central Harlem section of New York City. The school currently has an enrollment of more than 600 students who range in age from 16 to over 40. The student body is primarily black, male, and from the lower socioeconomic groups. However, the student population also includes whites, women, and a few higher socioeconomic backgrounds. The background of the faculty is as varied as the students. These heterogeneous groups are molded into a cohesive society through the school's overriding principle of diversity in unity. While a traditional college preparatory program is followed, courses are also given that reflect the student's interests and backgrounds. The particular courses are determined jointly by the students, faculty, and administration. Harlem Prep has created an educational milieu that enables students, whom other schools had labeled "deprived, different, disadvantaged, and disaffected" to achieve and develop. This exemplary program could be replicated elsewhere if administrators, teachers and able students create an atmosphere and expend an effort commensurate with that of Harlem Prep. (Author/JM)

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HARLEM PREP

(New York City, New York)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
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Preface

In efforts at improving the quality of education and at justifying expenditures for compensatory education and school desegregation, we are increasingly dependent upon the data of evaluative research. Yet the data from many of these evaluation efforts conducted over the past twelve years are confused and inconclusive. The findings from these studies are sometimes contradictory. The interpretations have become the subject of considerable controversy, particularly as these findings and interpretations appear to contradict some of our cherished assumptions concerning education and educability. The lack of clarity with respect to the meaning of these data and the value of such programs is in part attributable to a variety of problems in the design and conduct of evaluative research. Among these problems, increasing attention is being called to the fact that there are sparse data concerning the specific nature of program interventions. These tend to be reported under labels or brief descriptions which provide little information relative to the nature and quality of the treatments to which the pupils studied are exposed. In an effort at gaining a better understanding of the content and nature of some of these programs, this project was directed at describing selected programs thought to be exemplary of quality, progress, trends or problems in compensatory education and school desegregation. Ten compensatory education programs and two school desegregation programs were selected for detailed description.

The principal procedures utilized in this study included documentary

analysis, direct observation of programs and interviews with selected informants. The tasks to be accomplished included identification and selection of projects to be studied, collection of all available data on each project considered, field study of promising candidate projects, preparation of descriptive reports, final selection and reporting.

Following is the description of one of these selected programs.

For the complete report of this project see document number ED 099 458 in the ERIC system.

Designed to

provide an alternative college preparatory education for students who for various reasons, have dropped out of traditional secondary schools

provide opportunity of college attendance to able students who could otherwise not attend

Through

An educational atmosphere that reflects the contributions of a heterogeneous but unified administration, teaching faculty, and student body

a sensitive, dynamic administration of headmaster, curriculum administrator, and college placement officer

committed, flexible, able teachers

highly motivated, articulate, able students

relevant, varied curriculum

Harlem Prep has achieved

The college placement of all students who have successfully completed the course of study (approximately 500 students in 189 colleges since 1967)

the retention in college of all but 17 of those placed (of this 17, 3 died, and the others left because of military or family obligations.)

The state of programs designed to enable disadvantaged urban youth to attend post-secondary institutions and the concomitant efforts of colleges and universities to recruit them have brought many new students into higher education. Yet these endeavors have been aimed primarily at students who remained within traditional schools. Few programs have been directed at the student of college potential who "dropped out." The growth of the street academies and academies of transition, independent schools supported by contributions, is a response to the needs of this disadvantaged population. One of the most successful of these schools is Harlem Prep.

SUMMARY

Founded in 1967, Harlem Prep is an independent, non-sectarian school, located in the Central Harlem section of New York City. This area, home of the largest black community in the United States, is blighted by extreme poverty, substandard housing, high unemployment, a high crime rate, and rampant drug addiction. The school currently has an enrollment of more than 600 students who range in age from 16 to over 40. The student body is primarily black, male, and from the lower socioeconomic groups. However, the student population also includes whites, women, and a few higher socioeconomic backgrounds. The background of the faculty is as varied as the students'. These heterogeneous groups who espouse different religious and political philosophies as well are molded into a cohesive

society through the school's overriding principle of diversity in unity. Differences are tolerated and explored, and the determination to enable these students to further their education predominates. While a traditional college preparatory program is followed, courses are also given that reflect the student's interests and backgrounds. The particular courses are determined jointly by the students, faculty, and administration. Through the efforts of dedicated teachers and administration, Harlem Prep has created an educational milieu that enables students, whom other schools had labeled "deprived," "different," "disadvantaged," and "disaffected," to achieve and develop. At a time when the public questions the appropriateness of costly educational plants and technological systems, the success of this educational endeavor (located in a former supermarket) should give educators and educational planners pause. This exemplary program could be replicated elsewhere if administrators, teachers and able students create an atmosphere and expend an effort commensurate with that of Harlem Prep.

WHERE WHEN WHY

In 1967, Harlem Prep opened its doors (in New York City's 369th Armory) to 49 students. At the beginning, it recruited its student population from street academies and academies of transition. Today it draws on a much wider population for its student body and has moved to a former supermarket at 8th Avenue and 136th Street.

WHAT

The objects of Harlem Prep are defined in its charter:

To establish, conduct, operate and maintain a non-sectarian private college preparatory school for boys and girls between the ages of 16 and 21 who have dropped out of school and who, in the opinion of the administration of the school, can be motivated to complete secondary education to provide such education for such boys and girls, and to develop liaison with a number of colleges eager and willing to accept such graduates.

The age of the candidates now ranges from 16 to over 40, and the charter, granted provisionally for 3 years in 1967 by the New York State Department of Education, has been extended.

WHO Students

Students are not recruited at Harlem Prep. The rapid and steady increase in its enrollment (now over 600) is due to the reputation of the school. Principals and guidance counselors at other schools frequently refer students. Students initiate contact with the school. The parent and/or student calls or visits. Then the student receives information on requirements and admissions procedures. Students must fill a formal application within the specified time. The students are notified by mail when to report for the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test.

Those who pass the test are requested to return again for counseling. At that time, the student brings an autobiography which becomes part of a permanent record. He is counselled by the College Placement Counselor and completes a college placement form. During the session, the goals and objectives of both student and school are discussed. The prospective student talks with other faculty members, administrators, and students. If he and they feel that he could benefit from attendance at the Prep, he is admitted.

Most students have dropped out of other secondary schools. Some have attended parochial or other private schools. Others, like an LPN and a subway engineer, have come from semi-skilled and vocational occupations. Others had finished high school but were not prepared to enter college.

The more than 600 students who now contribute to the intellectual ferment at Harlem Prep represent many different national, cultural and religious backgrounds. The predominantly black and male student population includes Afro-Americans from the north, south, and mid-west and Africans from east and west Africa, the Caribbean, Canada, and the West Indies. There are Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Black Jews, Muslim followers of Elijah Mohammed, Muslim followers of Malcolm X, Orthodox Muslims, Buddhists and adherents of the Baha'i and Yoruba religions. Every major philosophy of civil rights is represented -- militant, middle class conservative, nationalist, and integrationist.

Former dope addicts, jail inmates, delinquents, and unwed mothers are students. Some students live with one or both parents, or guardians who are usually relatives. Approximately 30 percent of the

student body is married, but approximately 40 percent are parents (single and married). Of the twenty-five percent who are totally independent, ten percent are veterans. Some are employed by the school as part time clerks, secretaries, switchboard operators, janitors and cafeteria helpers. While the majority of students live in the five boroughs that comprise New York City, still others come from Nassau and Westchester counties, New Jersey, and Connecticut.

Yet despite this diversity, the students share several things in common: first they are primarily from the lower socio-economic strata of society; secondly, for most of them, Harlem Prep represents their last or only chance to continue their education. Most important, however, is their strong motivation and determination to achieve their goal -- attendance at college and eventually a professional career.

The lives which have brought them to this destination have taught them the elements of survival, but they are not bitter. Their motto "Mojo Logo", African words which translate to "unity" and "brotherhood," dominates the atmosphere. They speak with pride of the diverse races, nationalities, religions and philosophies among them.

Many aspire to become lawyers and doctors, although other social service professions and the physical sciences are also cited. They plan to return to their communities and help others to escape from the desperate surroundings with which they are all too familiar.

WHO Teachers

The backgrounds and professional experience of the teaching staff is as varied as that of the students. The teachers come from all parts of the United States, Iran, Guatemala and Barbados, and have taught in many countries. They represent different races and religions -- Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist and Baha'i. In age, they range from their early twenties through their fifties. Their experience is vast, some having taught for as long as 20 years. Only one is not certifiable by the State of New York. Some have only bachelors degrees; others have doctorates; still others have two masters degrees. One teacher in African history has no degree but has authored several books and been a guest lecturer at local colleges. This fall, newly graduated teachers, members of Harlem Prep's 1967 graduating class, will return to teach at Harlem Prep.

There is no formal recruitment of teachers at Harlem Prep. Interest in students is the major criterion employed in the choice of faculty from among the applicants who submit approximately 700 applications or resumes per year. A teaching candidate is interviewed to determine his or her possible contribution to the school. Those that are seriously considered then teach for two weeks with salary. During this period, the students and other faculty become acquainted with the prospective teacher and his ability. The administration, faculty, and students decide jointly on the final appointment.

Teacher turnover is slight. Some started with the school in 1966.

Most full-time teachers who leave desire to continue their own education. Volunteers from the Port Authority and many corporations, including ATT and IBM, return year after year to tutor and help with clerical work.

HOW

The success of Harlem Prep in achieving the college placement of its students and in the provision of an atmosphere in which this can occur is the result of two factors: a curriculum that fulfills the requirements for college admission and is more relevant to these attendants' world; and, more important, a teaching/learning environment based on mutual respect and understanding among administrators, faculty, and students.

CURRICULUM

Although initially the curriculum was determined by the teachers and administration, today students assist in the planning and selection of the courses that they will follow. In view of the size of Harlem Prep, the curriculum is extensive and diversified. Only mathematics and English are required subjects. The mathematics courses range from general mathematics to calculus and analytical trigonometry. American history, the history and culture of China, and African history are offered in the social sciences. A new course in philosophy has evoked tremendous enthusiasm and will be both continued and expanded. A course on Women in Literature is also given.

Science courses are offered in chemistry, physics and biology. Since much of the Prep's funding is from industry, opportunities for field trips abound.

HOW (cont'd) The Educational Milieu

The atmosphere that pervades Harlem Prep is largely responsible for its success. This results from the close effective relationships that exist between administrators, teachers, and pupils.

The headmaster, Edward F. Carpenter, has established this atmosphere and chooses faculty who will contribute to it. His capacity to share responsibility with capable individuals has promoted the attitude of mutual responsibility in goal achievement. His belief in human dignity and individual worth permitted reciprocal respect to flourish. Students and teachers believe that he is just and impartial, and the students trust him.

The curriculum administrator, Ann Carpenter, his wife, is responsible for the quality of the education within the educational setting. She has selected extremely able and committed faculty to execute the educational process.

The college placement officer, E. Solomon MacFarlane, understands the problems of these students and selects those who will be able to achieve the goal of college entrance. He also maintains close contact with approximately 200 colleges and universities, assists students to obtain financial aid, and keeps in touch with them after they go to college.

The hiring of teachers by joint decision eliminates the adjustment

problems that confront new teachers in other situations. More important, Harlem Prep teachers are able teachers and extremely knowledgeable about their subjects. They are flexible and able to make decisions. They demand proficiency, and they teach the student to relate the subject matter to his life in a way that is relevant to him as an individual.

Yet teachers do encounter problems with students; sometimes there are conflicts in personality, and occasionally teachers are accused of unfairness. Teachers have the ability and strength to accept student challenges, open criticism and incisive questions, even when these are expressed in anger. They appear to view questions as involvement instead of disruptions. When there are conflicts, these are discussed with an arbitrator and resolved to the satisfaction of both.

The students possess the ability and motivation to go to college. At Harlem Prep they receive guidance and assistance to get there. All students who receive a diploma from Harlem Prep enter college, although all students who enter do not receive a diploma. The selection process is not fail-safe and some students, whom seem ready, prove otherwise. The percentage who leave is small but does exist. Some of the inherent factors in school-leaving among the poor are operative at Harlem Prep. Inability of parents to provide financial support causes parental pressure to leave school. Moreover, the large number of parents among the student body and the students' own age contribute further to parental pressure to leave

school and earn a living. This is compounded by the dearth of part-time employment which would permit continuation of school and at the same time provide a means of support. Lack of babysitters is also instrumental.

Still other students are not committed or emotionally ready. These students sometimes return later to complete the requirements. Students are given leaves of absence when they are unable to continue in school. Emergency leaves are granted up to two weeks, with the consent of teachers and administration. The student is still responsible for his classwork. Longer leaves up to a year can be granted.

The students take an active part in the affairs of Harlem Prep. They have a student council and write their own constitution. A student serves on the board of trustees, and a student representative attends all faculty meetings. The council hears all student grievances and recommends action to be taken. Students and teachers plan course work together. Course evaluation by both students and teachers is an integral part of curriculum evaluation and modification.

One of the major overriding concerns is lack of funding for the school. An active student committee engages in various fund-raising activities, such as dances, parties, and tournaments. Well-known personalities, such as Sammy Davis, Jr., and Ossie Davis, have also participated in fund-raising activities. Students in the audio-visual department make video tapes for television advertisement and fund-raising. Students maintain a speakers' bureau and administer a student welfare account.

HOW Cost

Harlem Prep requires an annual expenditure of approximately \$450,000 - \$500,000 per year in order to operate. At present, the need to find additional funding absorbs much of the headmaster's time and energies and is an omnipresent source of concern. The Prep is currently supported by corporations including Standard Oil of New Jersey, IBM, Chase Manhattan Bank and Union Carbide, and by foundations including Ford and Carnegie. However it is unlikely that these grantors will fund the program indefinitely. Smaller grantors, affected by a tight economy, have been restricted. While there is an Upward Bound program, not all of the students are eligible for the program. Attempts to institute an annual tuition of \$200.00 were unsuccessful and the practice has been discontinued. The absence of permanent funding for the program is its major problem and would undoubtedly hinder any similar program contemplated elsewhere.

WHAT Evaluation

The program has achieved its goal to achieve college placement for its students. Students who complete the requirements are accepted by one or more colleges and receive a diploma. In the Spring of 1972, 140 students graduated and are now in colleges and universities throughout the United States. Four hundred-ninety-six students have been placed in colleges and universities since the school's founding

in 1967.

The school does not end its contact with the student when he enters college. The school contacts college counselors and assists the students to obtain financial aid. Students may return to Harlem Prep for psychological, emotional or academic assistance until they have made a satisfactory adjustment at college. The placement counselor maintains contact with the colleges to inquire about alumni progress. Only 17 who have gone on to college have left; of this total, 3 died, armed service obligations, economic pressure, and family responsibilities were other reasons.

EFFECTIVENESS

The project is basically an educational rehabilitation effort directed at providing an alternative route for youngsters who show some evidence of having potential for gaining college admission. If one can identify young adults who are appropriately motivated, these young people can be made acceptable for admission to higher education through the use of fairly traditional curriculum content, presented in a context which enhances its perceived relevance, and administered by a committed staff. Among its unique features is the school's assumption of responsibility for the development of its students until they are admitted to a post-secondary institution. Students simply do not graduate from Harlem Prep until they have gained admission to a college or equivalent.

There are few experiments in secondary education which are perceived to be more successful in serving minority group and

disadvantaged late adolescent and young adult populations than is Harlem Prep. Student and teacher morale is high. All students who complete the program at Harlem Prep are admitted to college. Of the initial thirty-five graduates of the school, two have returned to the institution as teachers. Street academies modeled after Harlem Prep are being developed in a number of urban areas around the country.

There are some problems, however, which bear closer study. One could argue that it is no substantial achievement to secure college admission for those students identified as most likely to succeed. It may be that the critical determining variable is the motivation to attend college on the part of the students, rather than the program of the institution. However, for a population for which college attendance is the exception rather than the rule, simple desire to go to college does not seem to be a sufficient condition to insure college admission. Consequently, an agency which seeks to secure college admission for such a motivated population must be viewed as socially useful even if none of its operations are unique. Beyond the question of social utility, however, is the nature of the processes by which such an institution achieves 100% placement for its graduates. In the review of this program it becomes evident that the selection process assumes great importance. Although the process is more subjective than objective and has not been subjected to definitive analysis and evaluation, it does appear that the school has identified several criteria which may be applicable to other efforts at more relevant selective admission.

The criteria utilized in teacher selection have proven highly successful. The major elements of that process seem to be:

1. Flexibility in adapting teaching methods and subject matter.
A teacher will teach algebra, trigonometry, geometry in the same class.
2. Teacher ability and strength of personality resulting in acceptance of strong student challenge, open criticism and incisive questions.
3. Teacher ability to react in such a way as to keep the lesson on topic, make subjects relate to the students, while letting students speak their minds.

It cannot be said that the curriculum categories of Harlem Prep are unique. However, within fairly traditional categories, it does appear that a wide variety of materials and problems are utilized as the vehicles through which content and process mastery are achieved. For example, students taking science courses make field trips to industrial laboratories where they are able to see the application of scientific principles and methodology. However, the absence of any high degree of systematization in curriculum development and the almost ad hoc nature of the process makes it difficult if not impossible to identify generalizable features. The contribution of the curriculum to the success of the students is probably a function of the almost fortuitous, yet positive, relationship between the special needs and interests of students and the interests and talents of teachers. Considerable effort seems to be directed at selecting staff members who can achieve congruence with Harlem Prep students and at ensuring that congruence is achieved and

maintained in their work. Such relationships are an important part of the program at this institution, but, since it is more intuitively based and personalistic in its expression, it is difficult to export and apply this feature to other programs.

The school gives considerable emphasis to the fact that it operates in an atmosphere of warmth and openness which provides freedom for teachers and students to express the full extent of their intellectual capacity, while, at the same time, contributing to the enrichment of self-concept on the part of the students. This is a position that finds wide support in the current approaches to education, and although many people associate enhanced pupil achievement with such circumstances of learning, there is, as yet, little definitive evidence to support these assumptions. One still may question the adequacy and rigor of scholarship developed under such circumstances and the transferability of skills and competencies acquired in such settings to other types of learning environments which are not so organized. In addition, there are real problems with respect to the generalizability of such organization of learning experiences. An open, unstructured learning situation may be contributing to student progress at Harlem Prep primarily because the students who come and stay bring high levels of motivation and relatively high levels of ability. The suitability of such an environment for less able and less motivated students and for students more in need of direction and structure is questionable. Yet most observers and all participants report that Harlem Prep works; students seek out the institution; they learn what they need and want there; they get admitted to college; and the institution provides an educational

opportunity not available to this population from other sources. We are forced to conclude that if one is looking for an alternative to the traditional high school for either a population such as that at Harlem Prep or a different population with similar abilities and needs, the model which is emerging here merits serious consideration.

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